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**Comments on Application by Bell Atlantic for Authorization Under Section
271 of the Communications Act to Provide In-region, Interlata Service in
the State of New York
(CC Docket No. 99-295)**

My name is Barbara Keefe and I am the Project Director of MainePOINT, a state grant whose mission is to provide opportunities to integrate new technologies into education programs throughout the state of Maine. I am employed by the University of Maine System Network with a grant from the Department of Education. Currently, I work with Deaf instructors at the Governor Baxter School for the Deaf on a small island off the coast of Maine, who teach American Sign Language over Maine's Asynchronous Transfer Mode (ATM) system. ASL is taught as a modern language for credit by a Deaf instructor to high school students in Maine.

Hundreds of hearing students are benefiting and the school is delighted to share this beautiful, gestural, language by way of our ATM technology. However, the ability of the network to support the school for the deaf and its population has met with limited success. Maine has a world class telecommunications system but the Gov. Baxter School for the Deaf is unable to connect with the population it needs most. Deafness is a very low incidence disability. The school population needs to interact with other schools for the deaf in other states.

The professional staff at this island school needs to interact with out of state resources as well; i.e. the National Technical Institute for the Deaf at the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, New York. An article in the New York Times (4/11/99) suggested the Commission might be changing its position on Bell Atlantic's request to engage in long distance markets and I was encouraged from an education perspective. I ask you to look favorably on Bell Atlantic's application in New York state. I am aware of how responsive Bell Atlantic has been to the needs of persons with disabilities. I applaud their vision in recommending the Gov. Baxter School for the Deaf as a pilot ATM site in Maine. This technology

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permits a live connection to the world of deafness via the primary language of the Deaf community, American Sign Language. Deaf students in Maine could collaborate on educational projects with deaf students in other parts of the country using this technology. We are anxious to do this. ATM is the only technology that carries a full video signal in such a manner. Deaf education has waited a long time for telecommunications networks to support its work. The time has come for us to utilize its capacity and power. Federal regulations that restrict that possibility penalize students, parents, and the professionals in the field of deaf education.

Please know that the issue I raise is not singular to a tiny school for the deaf in Maine. Schools for the deaf throughout the country are waiting in earnest for a positive resolution in this matter. Deaf education needs access to resources beyond state borders. I urge you to begin in New York state by approving New York's state's application.

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for Authorization under Section 271 of the
Communications Act to Provide In-region,
Intrastate Service in the State of New York
(CC Docket No. 99-295)

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October 14, 1999

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

I am a homeowner, teacher, student AND a residential telephone customer in New York State. My family and I incur about \$100 a month in local phone charges and about \$25 in long-distance phone charges. (I think I am being conservative here!) My local phone company is Bell Atlantic and my long distance carrier is AT&T.

I am in full support of Bell Atlantic's application and I URGE you, the FCC, to support it, also. I am in support of their petition for a number of reasons. The first being that it will afford me the opportunity of lowering my bill by offering package deals. They have, also, made a good-faith effort to meet all requirements necessary for being allowed to compete against the other long-distance companies (who was it who said "competition is good?") Besides those reasons, more important to me, and should be a major factor in your deciding in their favor, is that they provide "universally designed" and "accessible" services and products that meet the needs of a large segment of our population, individuals with disabilities that have special needs.

As a teacher and graduate student going for a Masters in Special Education, I am very sensitive to the issues that these individuals face. I am aware that many national organizations of people with disabilities have expressed support for Bell Atlantic's application. Organizations such as these, the National Association of the Deaf, Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc. and the American Council of the Blind, know more than I could ever hope to about what the issues are they face and who can help them. They have proclaimed their support for this application because of Bell Atlantic's impressive track record of serving people with disabilities. We need more companies like this, who are willing to go the extra mile to see that our citizens with disabilities are given the aid they need and deserve. Since they are willing to service ALL their customers equitably, I feel they should be given that chance.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I am sure you will do the right thing.

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